

LIMITING FATS IN YOUR DIET

The SenioRx/Wellness Program sponsored by the Alabama Department of Senior Services is offering dietary information on fats for the Month of April. The fats we consume come from animal and plant foods. Typically animal sources have saturated fats and plants provide unsaturated fats. To have a better understanding of how fat affects a person's health it is important to know about the different types of fats. The different kinds of fats are as follows:

Saturated fats: These fats are solid at room temperature. Some food choices high in saturated fat include fatty cuts of beef, pork and lamb. This includes regular ground beef; regular sausages, hot dogs, bacon, luncheon meats and some poultry such as duck. Saturated fats can "clog" the arteries, just as bacon drippings can clog a kitchen sink.

Unsaturated fats: These fats are liquid or very soft at room temperature. Unsaturated fats are found primarily in oils from plants. There are two types of unsaturated fats, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Polyunsaturated fat sources are from safflower, sesame, sunflower seeds, corn and soybeans, many nuts and seeds, and their oils. The monounsaturated fats are from canola, olive, peanut oils and avocados. Both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats may help lower the blood cholesterol level when used instead of saturated fats. Even though these are referred to as "healthy" fats, it is still important to limit the total fat eaten. These healthy fats will still add calories to your diet.

Trans fatty acids: Trans fatty acids (also called trans fat) is formed when liquid vegetable oils go through a chemical process called hydrogenation, that makes oils more solid. Food companies use hydrogenated vegetable fats because the fat will stay fresh longer and will give food a desirable taste, shape, and texture. The majority of trans fat can be found in shortenings, stick (or hard) margarine, cookies, crackers, snack foods, fried foods (including fried fast food), doughnuts, pastries, baked goods, and other processed foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. Some trans fat is found naturally in small amounts in various meat and dairy products. **Note:** Evidence suggests that consumption of trans fat raises LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels and lowers HDL ("good") cholesterol levels, causing the arteries to become clogged and increasing the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

Cholesterol: Cholesterol and fat are different. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is found in all cells of the body. The body needs some cholesterol to work the right way. Cholesterol is needed to make hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help digest foods. Cholesterol is only found in foods from animal sources. Some foods, such as egg yolks (egg whites are cholesterol-free) and organ meats such as liver and giblets are high in cholesterol. High cholesterol problems can be inherited. To lower bad cholesterol (LDL) takes a high fiber, low-fat coupled with physical activity.

Triglycerides: The triglycerides in the blood come from the fats eaten in foods or they are made in the body from other energy sources like carbohydrates. Triglycerides are a kind of fat carried through the bloodstream in packages called lipoproteins as well as the kind of fat that is stored in fat tissue. Lipoproteins that are rich in triglycerides are also rich in cholesterol. When a person has too many triglycerides in their plasma, it is called hypertriglyceridemia. This condition is linked to the occurrence of coronary artery disease. Elevated triglycerides may be a consequence of other disease, such as untreated diabetes mellitus.

It is important to have some fat in your diet because fat carries the vitamins A, D, E, and K and aids in their absorption in the intestines. Too much fat, however, can be harmful. By limiting the amount of fats, you reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, and being overweight. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consuming less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids and less than 300 mg/day of cholesterol, and keeping *trans* fatty acid consumption as low as possible.

So, for a general diet, if you are eating 2000 calories each day, up to 20 percent, or 400 calories, would be from unsaturated fat, and no more than 10 percent, or 200 calories, should be from saturated fat. Your total fat calorie intake would be 30 percent, or 600 calories from fat. This allows for no more than 66 grams of fat a day. This is less than most people consume. A fast food hamburger such as the double thick burger at Hardee's has 90 grams of fat; this does not count the fat consumed from French fries at the same time.

To lower fat intake, try seasoning with herbs instead of fats. Fresh herbs pack the most flavors. During the warm months, gardeners can grow their own herbs and then preserve their harvest by either freezing or drying. Some area grocery stores carry fresh-cut herbs in the produce section almost year around. Dried herbs can be found at any grocery store.

NOTE: When substituting dried herbs in recipes that call for fresh herbs, decrease the amount by half.

The following herbs can be incorporated into your recipes easily.

Basil: This is used in tomato-based dishes and salads, used in Italian recipes.

Parsley: Use for more than a garnish; try adding it to salads and vegetables.

Thyme: Delicious as an addition to stews, fish, lamb, pork and beef.

Chives: Sprinkle on baked potatoes, soups, eggs, and salads.

Bay Leaves: Use whole leaf in stews, fish dishes, venison, or marinades.

Marjoram or Oregano: Great in soups, sauces, and pizzas.

Tarragon: Add to fish or chicken

Mint: Salads, stuffing, vegetables and meats.

Sage: Stuffing or cornbread dressing for chicken, turkey, goose, and pork.

Rosemary: Great with steaks, stews, sausage, and chicken.